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REVIEWED BY J. L. SMITH DATE NOV 1 9 1982

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FOREIGN SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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SECURITY : [redacted]

PRIORITY : AIR POUCH

TO : Department of State

FROM : The Hague No. 201 August 8, [illegible]

REF :

SUBJECT : [redacted] ON KING LEOPOLD'S DECISION TO VACATE THE THRONE

755.11/8-850

1950 AUG 1 [illegible] 3 23

EUR INDEX

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INFO DCR OLI

The second wave of Dutch press comment on King Leopold's decision to turn the Belgian throne over to his son is little different from the first, except in the intensity of the emotions expressed. The Socialist press is still jubilant, and supports the Belgian Socialists with few reservations; the Catholic press takes a very grim view of the development and tends to be vitriolic in its description of the Belgian Socialists; the liberal press takes a position between the two extremes.

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Independent Socialist HET PAROOL declares that the Benelux Union gives the Dutch a direct interest in the Belgian situation, although it was necessary that the issue be resolved by the Belgians themselves. It then insists that the Catholic effort to restore Leopold constituted an all-out attack on democracy, since parliamentary democracy under his regime would have been impossible. Spaak tried to warn the Catholics, the paper continues, and did not omit to tell his opponents the values of freely functioning democracy. However, preference was given to the use of force, and Spaak and his supporters took up the struggle. Western Europe has reason to be grateful to Spaak and the liberal leaders for having saved democracy, HET PAROOL concludes.

Socialist HET VRIJE VOLK continues to blame the Belgian Catholic Party for the entire sequence of events. It says that it would have been unnecessary and unreasonable for the Socialists to have created a disturbance because of a simple Act of Parliament, but the problem concerned the King and therefore involved a basic constitutional issue. When the Catholics obtained a small majority in a national referendum, they assumed that this issue could be resolved thereby, which was a faulty assumption. The Dutch, in their decision on Indonesia which also touched the Constitution, were much wiser to insist on a two-thirds majority.

The prominent Catholic paper DE VOLKSKRANT, in an editorial written by the Catholic parliamentary leader, Professor Romme, describes the King's decision as a "black day for Europe". Although Spaak claims that he never threatened force, but only predicted its use, says the paper, it is an undeniable fact that

...force was used...

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forces was used against a majority in a democratic state and that the battle was moved from Parliament to the streets. For free Europe, it continues, the "Communist methods" used in Brussels should be regarded as the greatest defeat of democracy in the present age.

Catholic HET BINNENHOF tosses restraint to the winds and asserts (1) that Spaak and Buzet have destroyed democracy in Belgium, since the working masses now know that they can run things in their own way even if in a minority; (2) that new life has been given to the Belgian Communist Party; (3) that Spaak is no longer a fit person to preside over the Consultative Assembly meetings at Strasbourg; (4) that the recent editorial in HET VRIJE VOLK defending the Belgian Socialists should have appeared in Communist DE WAARHEID. The paper also observes that American distrust of the European Socialists has been evident in the past and that developments in Belgium will be grist for the American mill. The paper concludes by suggesting that the next session of Comisco issue a statement denouncing the recent attitude of their Belgian associates.

ALGEMEEN DAGBLAD takes what appears to be a more objective view, and stresses four points: (1) that the Leopold issue has not been solved, since the difficulties between the North and South, both economic and clerical, remain; (2) that Prince Baudouin has little chance of succeeding where his father failed; (3) that Spaak has accomplished a "terrific feat" and will be a man with the reputation of being able to make or break kings, but that there will remain considerable anxiety as to his reliability as a democrat; and (4) democracy has suffered a defeat in Belgium, inflicted by both sides.

The NIEUWE ROTTERDAMSE COURANT also observes that the Socialists have won an enormous victory. It believes that there is no doubt that the majority of the Socialists still have a strong distaste for violence, and that this feeling will prevail, although it is temporarily forgotten in the general feeling of triumph. The paper then predicts that the Catholic government may expect to face a most difficult time in view of this victorious feeling among Socialists.

Anti-revolutionary TROUW joins the Catholic press in expressing its horror of the "Belgian revolution", and agrees with ALGEMEEN DAGBLAD that the internal controversies which have torn Belgium apart for several years will probably remain. Whatever the verdict of history, the paper declares, one thing is certain: Leopold has been wiped out by a minority revolution,

...a thoroughly...

a thoroughly undemocratic and illegal deed. The paper then expresses the view that Spaak no longer fits his position as President of the Council of Europe, and that if Spaak in the future defends democracy, the whole world will sneer.

For the Ambassador:
William T. Nunley
William T. Nunley
Attache of Embassy

Copy to: Brussels

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